

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

March 20, 2020

Vice President Mike Pence
The White House
Office of the Vice President
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500

Ambassador Deborah Birx
Coronavirus Response Coordinator
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520

Vice President Pence and Dr. Birx:

We would like to thank you for the March 6, 2020 bulletin from the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), soliciting proposals for developing new or repurposed therapies and vaccines for the novel coronavirus (COVID-19). Now that Congress has passed a bipartisan supplemental funding package to support COVID-19 preparedness and response efforts across the country, we write to encourage the White House Coronavirus Task Force to ensure that the funding be quickly made available for research, development and review of products to protect the health and safety of the American people includes a strategic effort to develop a variety of treatment options for COVID-19 and COVID-19-related complications – particularly for those individuals who are most vulnerable to the virus.

As of March 20, 2020, more than 200 individuals in the U.S. and 9,840 individuals globally have lost their lives due to COVID-19-related complications, including Acute Respiratory Distress Syndrome (ARDS), with the threat of these numbers continuing to rise unless we respond quickly and meaningfully. ARDS, which can be caused by COVID-19 or other viruses or infectious pathogens, causes fluid to build up in the lungs, restricting oxygen supply to vital organs. Because ARDS can be fatal, we understand that BARDA leadership has proactively reached out to an Ohio-based biotech company that has developed a therapeutic approach that has shown promise in treating ARDS as a way to help bolster our response to COVID-19.

Congress supports BARDA's leadership in assessing how best to respond to the coronavirus and related conditions and acknowledged the value that new diagnostics, vaccines, and therapeutic options would play in preventing further outbreaks by including more than \$3 billion for the research, development, and review of new products that help to protect the health and safety of the American people from COVID-19 in the supplemental funding bill. This total includes more than \$2 billion for the Biomedical Advance Research and Development Authority (BARDA) to invest in promising platform-based technologies with U.S.-based manufacturing for vaccines and therapeutics.

The sooner we can develop effective treatment options for those most vulnerable to these complications – including the elderly, the infirmed, those who are immunocompromised, and others – the sooner we can curb the death rate associated with COVID-19. We urge the Task Force and BARDA to use the funding made available by the supplemental to strategically invest in areas that show promise in successfully treating those with COVID-19 induced complications, such as ARDS, and prioritize the U.S.-based manufacturing of any effective therapeutics identified through these efforts. As Congressional representatives for the State of Ohio, we've seen first-hand what our Ohio-based biopharmaceutical sector and manufacturing can accomplish, and we look forward to working with you to ensure that the federal government is effectively leveraging resources and partners both Ohio and across the country that are ready to step up and address COVID-19 and its related complications.

We stand ready to work with you to ensure the strategic and efficient implementation of the supplemental funding package to ensure Ohio and those individuals impacted by COVID-19 have the resources and support in place to prevent the further spread of this disease and improve the outcomes associated with the virus.

Sincerely,

Sherrod Brown
United States Senator

Rob Portman
United States Senator

Marcy Kaptur
United States Representative

Tim Ryan
United States Representative

Mike Turner
United States Representative

Robert E. Latta
United States Representative

Marcia L. Fudge
United States Representative

Steve Chabot
United States Representative

Steve Stivers
United States Representative

Joyce Beatty
United States Representative

David Joyce
United States Representative

Troy Balderson
United States Representative

Anthony Gonzalez
United States Representative

CC:

Mr. Alex M. Azar, Secretary of Health and Human Services
Dr. Deborah L. Birx, MD, White House Coronavirus Response Coordinator
Dr. Robert R. Redfield Jr., MD, Director of the Centers for Disease Control
Dr. Anthony S. Fauci, MD, NIAID Director
Mr. Kenneth T. Cuccinelli II, Acting Deputy Secretary of Homeland Security
Dr. Peter Navarro, Director of the Office of Trade and Manufacturing Policy
Dr. Robert P. Kadlec, MD, Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response
Dr. Rick A. Bright, Ph.D., Director of the Biomedical Advances Research and Development Authority (BARDA)